

# T<sup>3</sup>: Trustee Training Tips

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## CHOOSING THE RIGHT TRUSTEE

Few would argue that finding new trustees for your library board can be a daunting task, but it is one that the consequences of choosing poorly can be severe and long term. Therefore, it behooves every board involved in nominating potential trustees to think carefully about their choices.

Too often boards dismiss what might be a great candidate with, “Oh, she’s too busy with so many other commitments.” How do you know? Don’t undersell your library. Maybe this person would rather be on your board than something else and will make the necessary time. It’s a pretty sure thing that no one was ever insulted by being asked to be on a library board. Even if your choice must turn you down this time, he will be flattered to have been asked and might say “yes” later on. Either way, you’ve made a friend for the library. And, it’s nice to have influential friends supporting you.

Another pitfall many boards encounter is choosing candidates that are out of touch with today’s issues. If they think:

- ☛ blackberry is a cobbler,
- ☛ spam is a canned meat product,
- ☛ file sharing is a recipe exchange,
- ☛ cookies are a treat with milk,
- ☛ hard-drive is a trip by car from Ashland to Paducah, or
- ☛ piracy is found only on the high seas,

then you need to think about someone else. Techno-savvy board members are essential to making decisions about budgeting enough for ever-changing, ever-growing technology needs. Be wary of trustees that have never touched a computer and have a mind-lock centered totally on books. [editor’s note: we are not anti-book; we love books; we read them constantly and will never stop doing so; but we also recognize the reality of technology in the library and embrace it as well.]

And, speaking of budgeting, a library needs trustees that understand the tax money collected for library purposes needs to be spent on library services, not invested in certificates of deposit or other investments. This is not your own money. You do not need to save it for retirement or to leave to your heirs. Hoarding money, beyond a reasonable amount for emergencies, is theft by deception. You took the people’s money to provide them library services; you legally owe them that.

Find potential trustees that appreciate both the past and eagerly anticipate what the future can bring to your library. They do exist and you can find them. Happy hunting!

## TRUSTEES' ROLE IN PR

Any library trustees who might view public relations lightly do their library a great disservice. It is true that a library cannot be made into what it is not by promotion or publicity alone. But it is equally true that sound public relations: (1) has a far wider meaning than "promotion or publicity;" (2) has a far deeper value, not only to the library board and library, but to the people in the community; and (3) is essential for full community support of the library. To look at public and community relations as an unessential frill which can be undertaken sporadically is to overlook a vital element in successful library planning. It is also to overlook a primary responsibility of each trustee and the library board as a whole.

Trustees are advocates for the library. Public relations is the image the trustee or someone from the library conveys to the public. It is the board's responsibility to see that the image is as positive as it can be. Good public relations do not just happen—they must be cultivated.

Trustees, both individually and collectively, can improve the public's knowledge and awareness about the library program by:

- ✓ Speaking to various groups and organizations (civic, business, professional, and social) about library programs, services, and facilities.
- ✓ Finding out the community's reaction to the library and its services, including program suggestions and other improvements, and relaying these ideas back to the director.
- ✓ Standing up for the library's needs when communities plan for public services.

- ✓ Being vocal and visible by letting people know you are a trustee, sharing library programs and development at every organization meeting you attend.
- ✓ Writing, calling, or emailing your local, state, or national public officials on behalf of the library.
- ✓ Bringing new members on board and assuring a broad and diverse community representation on the board.
- ✓ Encouraging stimulating programs and services in the community.

Trustees should encourage the library director to work with the board in developing a sound public relations policy and action program. Such a program is essential to any library which expects to maintain and increase its community support. Public and community relations can become the means by which a trustee's community knows, appreciates, and uses the public library to the fullest extent.

Kentucky Public Library Standards suggest, in part, the following:

- ✓ a public relations line item in the budget, with percentage amounts dedicated to this function
- ✓ forming alliances with other community groups to increase visibility
- ✓ regular image evaluations of the library facilities
- ✓ develop and adopt a written public relations policy

Has your library done a public relations assesment of itself lately? Does it do so periodically?

*--portions of the above adapted from the Nebraska Trustee Handbook, Nebraska Library Commission*

## MODERN TRENDS IN FORMATS

An article in the Covington (KY) *Enquirer* dated May 27th discussed the demand placed on public libraries for non-print materials—and the corresponding effect on their budgets. It raised questions that are those that trustees must answer for their respective libraries, even the smallest ones. How much of the materials budget should go to what many of us think of as “non-traditional” sources? Are these really non-traditional anymore?

“For traditionalists, the library is a temple to the preservation and appreciation of books. It’s a place for meandering down rows of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and reading in a quiet corner. For busy families, it’s a bustling spot to pick up the latest hit movies, CDs, and audio books, and even surf the Internet—all for free.

“Will the real library please stand up? What is a library supposed to be? It’s not merely an academic question.”

Public libraries are in a constant state of flux, changing to meet the ever changing demands of their users. Some materials are still with us, like books, other formats have gone the way of 35mm filmstrips and Beta video. Some of the decisions boards of trustees have made in the past may seem like no-brainers today; others may surprise you that they were ever in contention.

Steropticon pictures, those side-by-side pictures that were viewed through a stereoscope, were made until the mid-1900s. They were collected by libraries—until television, microfilm, and slides replaced them.

And here’s what should be a big surprise: until the 1890s, public libraries did not carry books for children. Before that, children under age 14 were actually barred from most public libraries! Read *The Story of*

*Libraries* (© 2001) by Fred Lerner for an eye-opening history of our early roots.

Vinyl records (78s, 45s, and 33 1/3 rmps) were still found in some libraries just a decade or so ago. Even audio cassettes are fading away in the onslaught on compact disks. Anyone remember 8-track tapes?

Another recent demise the 16mm film. KDLA closed its collection just a very few years ago, not only because the medium was outdated, but equipment for projecting it was difficult to find. Currently we are witnessing the slow death of VHS video tapes in favor DVD video format. Even audio books are becoming more and more on disks and less and less on tapes. The car industry is aware of changing trends; newer models don’t even have tape players anymore.

Now we are on the cusp of the age of electronic books. Will your library respond to modern formats? If it wishes to survive, it must. Just remember, it doesn’t mean the death of traditional books any more than it means the death of libraries.

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## **LIBRARY LETTERS**

*Dear Marian Librarian,*

*During a recent review of our by-laws I found we are supposed to have an Annual Meeting each June. What is this and do we need to do it?*

*-- Troubled Trustee*

Dear Troubled,

You are likely not alone in having such an article in your by-laws, nor in ignoring it. There is nothing in library law that requires an annual meeting in addition to the monthly meetings. What you have is probably “leftovers” from an earlier time when the library was incorporated. Under those circumstances, an annual meeting would be required (KRS 271B.7-050). However, becoming a taxing district would likely supersede the incorporation, making the meeting unnecessary. If the library is still using “Inc” as part of its name and is now a legally established district, it needs to dissolve the corporation and then remove this language from the by-laws.

## **HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?**

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The expanded answers are under “Publications” on KDLA’s web page @ [<www.kdla.ky.gov>](http://www.kdla.ky.gov).

1. Should you assume any potential candidate for your library board would not wish to serve? Why or why not?
2. Name two pitfalls library boards may encounter in selecting new trustees. Why are these a problem?
3. What are a trustee’s responsibilities in promoting the library through good public relations?
4. What is a public library supposed to be? Why do you think so?
5. When would a public library not amend its by-laws to eliminate the annual meeting?

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## **ANSWERS TO T<sup>3</sup> QUIZ:**

### **1. Should you assume any potential candidate for your library board would not wish to serve? Why or why not? [page 1]**

*Never make this error in judgment. Only the potential trustee can speak for him- or herself. Neither you, as an individual trustee, nor the entire board should assume anything about a potential board member's willingness or unwillingness to serve. Remember, it is often said, when you want something done find a busy person to do it. Busy people are usually civic minded and just might put the library board before another civil opportunity. Said person may be thrilled to join your board, so don't see your library short.*

### **2. Name two pitfalls library boards may encounter in selecting new trustees. Why are these a problem? [page 1]**

*One is assuming a good choice won't be interested. [see above answer]. Another is selecting someone out of touch with today's issues, trends, technology, especially in information delivery services. Still others include those who view the library's budget as their own and wish to hoard funds for some "future need" rather than provide needed services today; those that see a library as a warehouse of books rather than a public information utility; those with personal agendas that, while not a legal conflict of interest, are not in keeping with the library's mission.*

### **3. What are a trustee's responsibilities in promoting the library through good public relations? [page 2]**

*Trustees are advocates for the library; it's in the job description. First of all, they need to include promotion funds in the annual budget. Putting your money where your mouth should be is essential. Next comes adoption of a policy that states the board's commitment and boundaries regarding public relations. Good PR does not just happen—it must be cultivated. Trustees need to make sure their director is committed to good public relations, publicity, promotionals, and even marketing and evaluate performance in this area. Finally, they need to step forward and be seen supporting their library. Speaking at clubs and organizations, attending library functions, staffing library exhibits at local fairs and festivals, speaking out about library needs, and proclaiming its are basic responsibilities.*

### **4. What is a public library supposed to be? Why do you think so? [page 3]**

*The public library is best seen as a public information utility—much like police protection, garbage pickup, and electricity are public service utilities. That does not mean it forgoes its role in pleasure reading, but that it is seen as more than a building housing books. A public library needs to keep current with new ways to deliver information—not hang on to what has always been adequate. Like it or not, times are changing and to be viable in the electronic age, libraries must change with them. It can be an exciting future!*

### **5. When would a public library not amend its by-laws to eliminate the annual meeting? [page 4]**

*When the library is a legally incorporated entity. Otherwise there is no need to burden the board with an additional meeting each year, and the language should be removed from the by-laws.*